

Could the war against the Islamic State contribute to rapprochement between Moscow and Washington?

This article was published in <http://www.almadaen.com.sa/news/details/11902> on 28 September 2014

The US-led war against the Islamic State (IS) group in Syria is seemingly succeeded in converging the views between the US and the West on the one hand and Russia on the other hand.

Although Russia is not a member of the international coalition against the militant group, Moscow and Washington share thematic interests in the fight against terrorism.

The Kremlin sees the latest developments a confirmation of the relevance of its policy towards the Syrian regime as well as supporting it for fear the whole region is controlled by the Islamist militant groups.

Contradiction between the US and Russia became crystal clear during the United Nations General Assembly meetings in New York when the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani considered the emergence of the IS radical group a victory for the Russian positions as a result of the strategic mistakes of the West in the Middle East.

This came in accordance with the views of the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov who expressed anger at statements contained in the speech of US President Barack Obama saying : "I'm amazed because the US president said that the world has become more safe and more free" despite threats posed by a number of extremist groups against the whole world.

However, this does not preclude all tangled interests and full convergence in other files such as fighting terrorism in Iraq. Moscow handed over to the US-backed Iraqi government Russian-made Mi-28 helicopters and Sukhoi-25 fighter-bomber which is very influential on tanks and fortified sites.

The fighter jet has unguided rockets, machine guns and radar with a range of 20 kilometers. These jets have the ability to fly in all-weather day and night. The helicopter is fully armored and is equivalent to the US Apache helicopters, according to the Iraqi army.

Lavrov also announced that his country will "contribute" in international military efforts against the Islamic State group in full consistent with the American policy.

He stressed at the international conference which was held in Paris to fight the IS group saying: "We will contribute to the joint effort, but we will do this with broader aim of preparing more depth analysis to this situation" and that this "contribution will be allocated to support the Iraqi government in order to make sure they are able to fight terrorists and to ensure the state security. We also provide military assistance to Syria, among other assistance, as it faces very serious terrorist threat, so the ideological considerations should not undermine our response to it," in an allusion to the US policy, considering Iran and Syria the Russian natural allies in the fight against the IS group.

However, Moscow returned and contrasted again with the Western American politics and questioned the legitimacy of some of the American strikes against the IS group due to the absence of the approval of the UN and Syria which in its soil some of these strikes were carried out.

Despite US Secretary of State denied that the war against IS group in Syria is a kind of support to the Syrian president; Russia has always declared its support to Bashar al-Assad in his war against opposition fighters. Moscow considers Al-Assad's survival a great success of its foreign policy and now wants to see the West implicitly recognizes his legitimacy through dealing directly with him.

Moscow accuses Washington of double standards policy in its dealings with Syria. It stresses the need to support the Syrian government saying: "When we called on in the past to support the Syrian government in its fight against terrorism, no one seemed willing to listen to us."

Moscow has an interest in fighting the IS group who directly threatened President Putin and promised to liberate the North Caucasus, according to a video posted by the militant group.

It is the same interest in which the West and the US sees the IS group threatens the world and that failure to eliminate it will open the door for the extremist organizations to impose their control and threaten the international peace and security.

Despite contradiction in positions between the US and the West on the one hand and Russia on the other hand, the recent attacks against IS group converged a lot of views between the two rivals.

Russia is seeking to invest this convergence in supporting its ally Al-Assad who has shown openness towards the international community help provided to him in fighting his opponents with full force after he failed to stop their attacks and their control of city after the other. He welcomed these attacks and demanded to participate in the international coalition exploiting the recent Russian-American rapprochement.

Did the Islamic State militant group succeed in mobilizing the enemies of yesterday against it? And turning them into friends and allies? Does the existence of this alliance carries the good for our nation and the Arab world? Or is it the beginning of new Western attempts to control and dominate the Arab world under the banner of fighting terrorism?